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State Aide Hilsman Quits; Bypassed in Viet Moves

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By Chalmers M. Roberts

Staff Reporter

Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman resigned suddenly last night, a move related at least in part to the crisis in South Viet-Nam.

The White House released a "Dear Roger" letter from President Johnson, together with a Hilsman letter praising the President, after word leaked out that the official would quit.

It was the first resignation of the Johnson Administration connected with a policy matter. However, Hilsman's associates and close friends said it was more a matter of his having been bypassed at the State Department than an actual difference over how to run the war in South Viet-Nam.

Bypassing Seen

Only a day before the resignation, State had announced appointment of a special assistant to Secretary Dean Rusk to "sharpen the focus" on the Viet-Nam problem, an act that Hilsman's friends said he could hardly take as other than a slight. Hilsman himself was not available for comment last night.

It was evident, too, that Hilsman, though himself a West Point graduate and World War II veteran of Merrill's Marauders in Burma and of the Office of Strategic Services, had clashed on more than one occasion with the Pentagon. Nor was he fully accepted by the Foreign Service regulars at State, though he had enjoyed the confidence of President Kennedy.

Like many others, Hilsman has found he had less direct access to the new President than to his predecessor, friends said. Hilsman was one of those who helped convince Mr. Kennedy of the need for anti-guerrilla forces in such areas as Viet-Nam, and Mr. Kennedy had promoted him from intelligence chief of State to Assistant Secretary.



Associated Press

ROGER HILSMAN
... quits State Department

Backed Current Policy

Officials involved in the Viet-Nam problem said that while Hilsman was a man of strong views, he had not dissented from the current Administration policy of first beefing up the anti-Communist war as now being fought while studying various possibilities of carrying the war into Communist North Viet-Nam.

Viet-Nam, commented one official, is "a problem which has broken the back of many a man."

The exchange of official letters, which was not due to be released until a successor had been named, was couched in the most friendly tones. Mr. Johnson praised Hilsman for having served "with great courage and dedication in posts of the most difficult

and demanding sort." Hilsman wrote the President that "there is no man in America who is better fitted for leadership than you."

Wants Academic Life

Hilsman said that he had long felt he must return to private life, that he wanted to return to academic life and that he would be happy to offer any future help "compatible with my academic post." However, he has not yet accepted such a post.

Hilsman's letter to Mr. Johnson also said that "President Kennedy would have been proud—as are all of us who worked with him—of the vigor and sureness with which you have managed affairs." And Mr. Johnson spoke of his "reluctance" at seeing Hilsman leave "to return to your chosen profession."

All of this, however, did not disguise the fact that Hilsman had, in effect, been downgraded in the handling of the Viet-Nam crisis, that he therefore had quit and that his resignation was the first break of any policy consequences in the Johnson Administration.